

Aspects of Status and Mobility among Farmers and Their Families in Msengezi African Purchase Land

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Sociological studies of mobility, here defined as the movement of individuals and categories of people within society or 'social space' (Sorokin, 1959), have tended to concentrate on urban dwellers, particularly in Europe and North America. To a considerable extent, this urban focus is also found in the literature on migration, or geographical mobility, in African countries, although some studies have dealt with certain of the effects of such geographical mobility on the rural areas to which the migrants return (e.g. Schapera 1947; Watson 1958; Winter 1955). But with the exception of those studies of social categorisation and social movement which are basically theoretical and may, therefore, apply in principle to rural as well as to urban dwellers (e.g. Lloyd 1966; Tuden and Plotnicov 1970), there is a dearth of information on mobility in a rural context in African societies. This paper is thus intended to contribute to this hitherto neglected field.

The politico-administrative intention behind the creation of the freehold farming areas known as Purchase Lands in Rhodesia in the nineteen-twenties was, *inter alia*, to create a 'yeoman peasantry'. It is generally considered that this 'yeoman peasantry' has not, in fact, materialised; so in order to indicate what sort of 'class' categorisation and mobility patterns are actually arising in these areas, an examination of one old-established Purchase Land within one hundred kilometres of Salisbury will be undertaken. In order to make this examination, however, it is necessary first to identify the objective components of social categorisation and then to consider the types of mobility relevant to such classification.

It is frequently asserted (e.g. by Lloyd, 1966) that social divisions and social categorisation in African societies run along ethnic, lineage and age lines, and that internal perception of horizontal distinctions, in terms of affluence, occupation and status based on these characteristics, is lacking in these societies. Lloyd notes, too, that political considerations in the form of ideologies of classlessness, may be partly responsible for this alleged non-recognition of socio-economic divisions in modern African states. In Msengezi Purchase Land, however, the explicit recognition of socio-economic divisions among farmers is beginning to be verbalised, and a rudimentary horizontal stratification, based on distinctions of wealth, education and occupation, is readily identified.

Since wealth (measured in terms of material possessions) and occupation are the most important determinants of social status, these factors have been used in assessing and categorising the status of individual farmers. The indices of education and occupation have been used in an attempt to demonstrate socio-economic mobility among farmers' children, and to indicate some factors affecting such mobility. Because mobility is a dynamic concept, an attempt has been made to incorporate a time perspective by using employment histories and by considering the more important factors (such as education policy) which may affect the future occupational mobility of the second and subsequent generations of Purchase Land origin. Before considering socio-economic factors, however, one must first examine the physical movement or geographical mobility which brought these farmers to this particular Purchase Land.

GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY

All landholders have come to the Purchase Lands as immigrants, selected by successive land boards, from widely dispersed areas, and are thus ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous. Table I shows the farmers' areas of birth and the areas from which they actually moved to settle in Msengezi. People who came from different areas generally display important differences in cultural outlook: in particular, people from mission stations and towns show significant differences in outlook from those who came directly from tribal areas. Such differences in behaviour patterns and values are significant determinants of expenditure patterns, and all three influence social classification.

Table I

FARMHOLDERS' BIRTHPLACES AND 'LAST PORTS OF CALL'

Area Category	Birthplace %	'Last port of call' %
Reserves/T.T.L.s	75.6	53.9
Mission Stations	9.3	15.5
European-owned Farms	3.8	5.8
Purchase Lands	4.5	2.6
Towns	5.5	22.3
Outside Rhodesia	1.4	—

Table I shows that the majority of farmers relocated from one rural home to another, although considerably fewer moved from tribal areas than had been born there, indicating considerable geographical mobility prior to settling in Msengezi. This past movement reflects occupational mobility and exposure to new employment as wage earners. Most employment opportunities were in towns, and this distribution is reflected in the proportion of farmers who moved into Msengezi from various towns. In general, those who migrated from towns were not migrant labourers, but relatively well-educated and stabilised urban workers in white-collar, lower professional or uniformed services employment. Many owned town businesses and some still do, including those wealthy businessmen who have bought farms from previous titleholders and who manage these farms from their town homes. This movement outwards from the towns into this Purchase Land by relatively well-educated men holding responsible positions, does not represent a basically

rural orientation, as some Rhodesian Whites believe, but a much more fundamental search for land security in the form of freehold title, oriented towards retirement free from the constraints of a tribal system to which these men do not subscribe. Indeed, the search for land security and a desire to live in privacy, together with a dislike of tribal authority, have motivated men from the Tribal Trust Lands to settle in Msengezi as well.

It is generally believed that Purchase Land farmers enjoy a higher standard of living than is characteristic of the tribal areas and there is some evidence to support this belief.* Indeed, some purchase land farmers enjoy a higher standard of living than do the majority of urban workers. The orientation of Msengezi people is towards what they perceive as 'town standards', and at the same time they consider their position to be immeasurably better than that of tribal area residents. In the light of these views, it is interesting to note the present areas of permanent residence of Msengezi farmers' children born before 1955 and thus of employable age.

Table II

PRESENT PERMANENT RESIDENCE AREAS OF FARMERS' SONS AND DAUGHTERS

Area Category	Sons: %	Daughters: %	Total: %
Reserves/T.T.L.s	4.0	10.8	7.4
Mission Stations	0.5	1.0	0.8
European-owned Farms	1.0	0.4	0.7
Purchase Lands†	56.2	58.6	57.4
Towns	30.7	23.9	27.3
Outside Rhodesia	2.4	2.1	2.2
Boarding Schools	5.2	3.2	4.2

A comparison of Tables I and II indicates a very small return flow of farmers' children

*For instance, in the much higher populations of purchase land farm homesteads than of those in tribal areas (cf. Hughes, 1974); in the much increased proportion of crops sold from Purchase Land farms (Hunt, 1960); and in Msengezi particularly, by ownership of a functioning motor vehicle by 18 per cent of the farmholders.

†This category includes sons and daughters aged 19 to 25 years who are single and working on their fathers' farms; older daughters married to other purchase land farmers; sons who have bought their own farms; and sons and daughters working as teachers, nurses and other local council employees in Msengezi or other purchase lands.

to the tribal areas, with a substantial difference between sons and daughters in this respect: more than double the number of daughters live in tribal areas than do sons. The majority of farmers' sons who are resident in tribal areas are in fact skilled or professional workers (notably agricultural extension assistants and teachers); very few are tribal cultivators. Among farmers' daughters resident in tribal areas, in contrast, a minority are teachers or nurses: most are married women, their husbands being either cultivators or migrant workers. Thus rather more females than males are 'shipped back' to tribal areas from Msengezi Purchase Land, and this differential is related to marriage: women are more likely to 'marry down' and move to a tribal area if they marry men from these areas, whereas farmers' sons who marry women from tribal areas either bring their wives to the Purchase Land or take them to town. The fact that fewer daughters of farmers marry spouses whose homes are in tribal areas than do their brothers (64 compared to 71 per cent), may be related to this differential movement between areas which are differentially ranked in terms of socio-economic status.

Although Table II includes both married and unmarried children, those ages range upwards from nineteen years, it would appear that most of these children remain within the Purchase Land category, while the next largest proportion establishes town homes. These proportions may alter slightly with movement through the age structure and with marriage, but the broad pattern is likely to remain unchanged. If we consider this geographical movement in the light of the socio-economic ranking, in 'upward' order, of tribal areas-Purchase Lands-towns, found among Purchase Land residents, then it would seem that there is very little 'downward' mobility to the tribal areas. What downward movement there is in this respect affects mainly women, through marriage. In contrast, nearly one-third of farmers' sons and nearly one-quarter of farmers' daughters move 'upwards' to the town level. Of course, geographical movement of this nature does not always coincide with a change in socio-economic status, which is heavily dependent on occupational mobility in present-day Rhodesia. For instance, the socio-economic circumstances of extension assistants, teachers and nurses working in the

tribal areas do not reflect downward mobility despite geographical movement to a less highly regarded land category. Likewise, the position of unskilled labourers in town does not reflect upward socio-economic mobility, irrespective of the move into a more highly regarded environment. Nevertheless, the trend of geographical mobility does reflect, broadly, the socio-economic values of Purchase Land residents expressed in the tribal areas-Purchase Lands towns rank order.

INCIPIENT INTERNAL STRATIFICATION

Substantial differences in incomes, income sources and standards of living exist within most Purchase Lands. These differences rest to a large extent on differing educational levels, which have influenced past and present employment experience in both town and country, as well as on differential agricultural productivity. Contemporary patterns of stratification and mobility therefore have their roots in the (non-agricultural) past occupations of men who are now farmers. As such, one must be careful not to assume that the present situation is 'indigenous' to this purchase land: it is in fact related closely to conditions in the wider, external society of Rhodesia and has relatively little to do with farming itself. Income levels in Msengezi range from subsistence plus to several thousands of dollars per annum, with relatively few cases at either extreme. A composite economic index is a more satisfactory method of assessing economic standing than is claimed income, however, not the least because such an index reflects expenditure patterns and, therefore, values. In terms of such an index, incorporating type of housing, transport ownership, business interests, income sources, farm enclosure and mechanisation, individual farmers have been classified into four economic categories, A, B, C and D in decreasing rank order. Respectively, 6, 16, 76 and 2 per cent of farmers fall into these categories, and for all practical purposes, category D is of negligible significance and may be ignored.

Having identified these differing economic categories, educational and occupational levels were then plotted against economic category (see Diagrams 1 and 2). From these diagrams, it is clear that the educational and occupational levels of farmers in economic category A are considerably higher than those

Diagram 1

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF FARMERS BY SOCIO-ECONOMIC CATEGORY

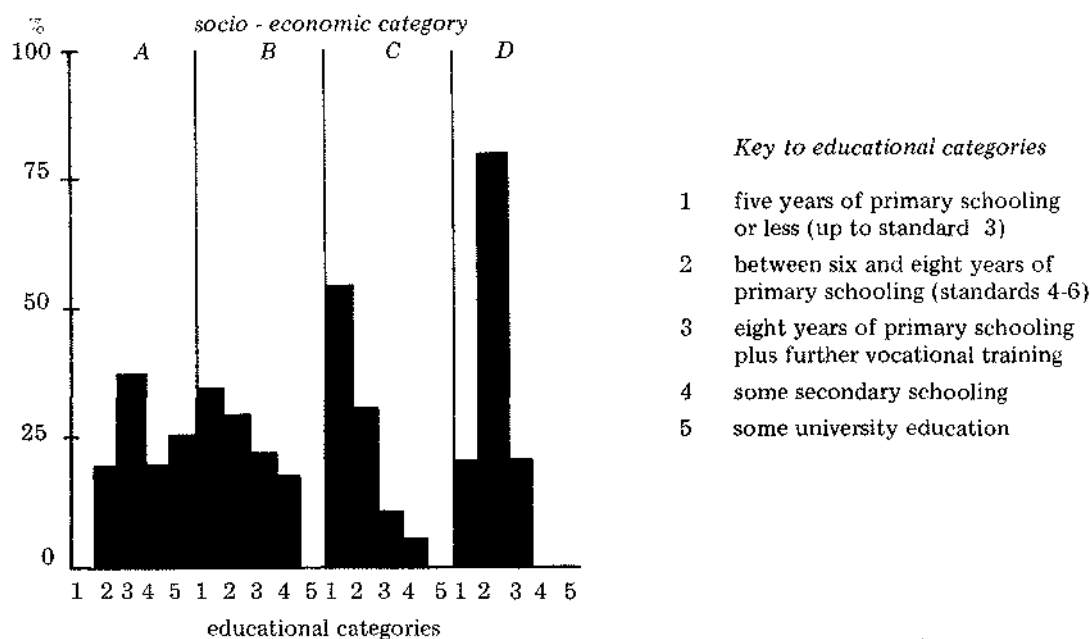
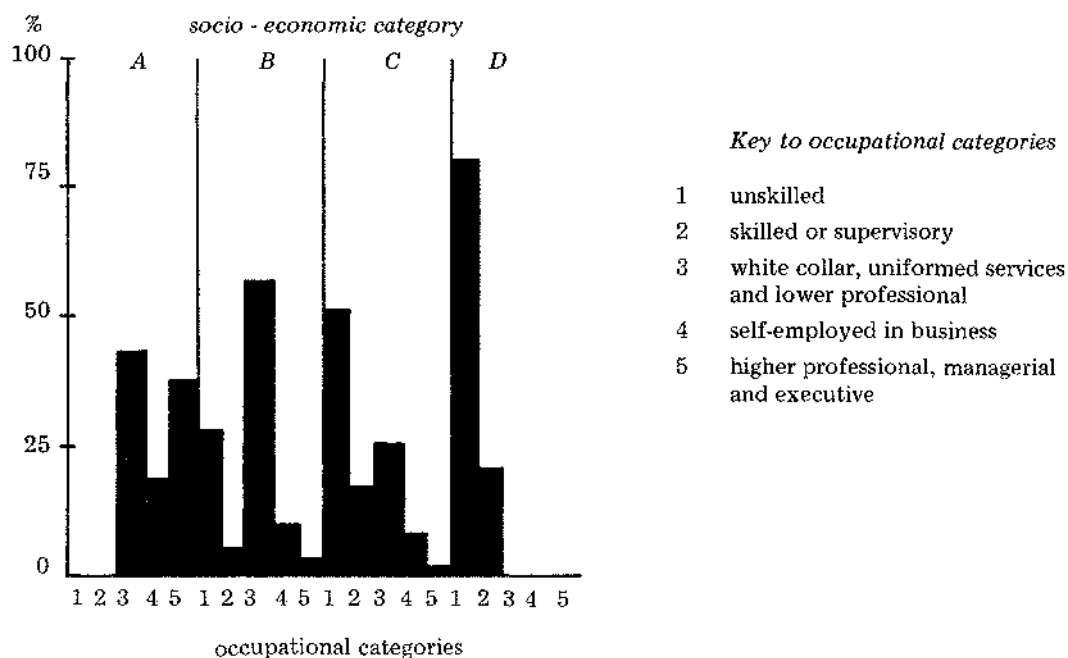


Diagram 2

LAST OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY OF FARMERS BY SOCIO-ECONOMIC CATEGORY



of farmers in any other economic category: indeed, the distribution patterns for category A farmers are quite distinct from those of other categories. The differences in educational and occupational levels between farmers in economic categories B and C, however, are of degree rather than kind.

Marital status was also plotted against economic category, revealing the distinctive pattern of 100 per cent monogamy among farmers in economic categories A and D and over 20 per cent polygynous marriages among those in economic categories B and C. Presumably the monogamous status of those in category D is explained primarily by their financial inability to marry several wives, but the same argument cannot be advanced for those in economic category A, where the monogamy rate must be seen as a result of the adoption of European-model cultural norms by generally better-educated men, most of whom have been employed in professional jobs.

Having shown that the indices of education, occupation and marital status add some measure of confirmation to economic distinctions in Msengezi Purchase Land, one must ask whether these socio-economic categories are simply heuristic devices or whether they actually reflect some kind of incipient class structure. In order to answer this question, one must look at patterns of interaction among the individuals within these categories. 'Interaction', in this context, includes both social visiting and common membership of committees and voluntary associations, but excludes all forms of involuntary and formal behaviour enjoined by public expectation and/or by impersonal role enactment.

Table III

INTERACTION LINKS WITHIN DIFFERENT
SOCIO-ECONOMIC CATEGORIES

Category	Intra- Category random av. %	Actual links %	% increase over random expectation
A	6	26	433
B	16	23	144
C	76	77	—
D	2	0	—

The figures in Table III suggest that there is a developing tendency for persons of higher

socio-economic standing in this Purchase Land to interact among themselves rather than with with persons of lower status: this tendency is most pronounced among those in socio-economic category A. It would seem, then, that these categories represent what might be termed 'proto-classes' in a developing, or incipient class structure. Indeed, some farmers explicitly recognise 'rich', 'average' and 'poor' farmers as socio-economic classifications, while many others distinguish 'educated' and 'uneducated' as identifiable categories. This latter distinction indirectly points to distinctions of wealth as well. Furthermore, in identifying important individuals in Msengezi, many farmers specified wealth as one reason for their importance: all of those whose wealth was thus explicitly identified fall into categories A or B above. There is thus considerable direct evidence to support the contention that a class structure based on socio-economic factors is emerging in this Purchase Land, both in terms of the recognition of socio-economic differences by the farmers themselves and in the reflection of these differences in patterns of interaction.

Further supporting evidence for a developing class structure may be found in interaction claims: in aggregate terms, people in the lower socio-economic categories claimed more links to those in higher categories than were reciprocated, which suggests that, as farmers improve their socio-economic standing, they tend to sever links with erstwhile friends and with classificatory and affinal relatives who remain at lower levels. Those in the lower categories, however, tend to maintain their claims to interaction with those who have moved upwards, partly for the 'rub-off' in status that such claims confer.

Finally, although there exists in Msengezi an egalitarian ethic which is expressed in such terms as 'There is no-one important here' and 'We are all just farmers: *varimi chete*', this assertion of equality contradicts the observable reality of social relationships. In effect, this assertion of equality on the basis of *present* occupation is used to deny status differences based on *past* occupation, by farmers in the lower socio-economic categories. Such assertions may be viewed as aggressive attempts to deny, even to obliterate, status differentials which are becoming increasingly patent.

OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY

As noted earlier, socio-economic status is related both to educational level and, more importantly, to occupational background, which is largely dependent on educational level (or has been in the past). By using data on occupational histories, it is possible to trace patterns of past occupational mobility among present-day farmers and thereby to indicate, very broadly, the means by which current socio-economic differentials may have arisen.

Only 7.6 per cent of farmholders have never been employed, and these men (some still minors at school) have not been considered in respect of occupational mobility. Of the remainder, the majority (65.1 per cent) were either horizontally mobile between jobs at the same occupational level, or else were occupationally static, being employed in one job only. However, 27.3 per cent were vertically mobile, moving between different occupational levels. Most of this vertical mobility was upwards (22.1 per cent): only 5.2 per cent moved downwards. Thus over one-fifth of these present-day farmers showed at least moderate success — and in a few cases, spectacular success — in improving their occupational positions during their period of employment. Only 43.4 per cent of all Msengezi farmers ended their employment period in unskilled jobs.

A number of different 'strategies for mobility' have been used by these farmers. There is, firstly, the 'promotional strategy', whereby an unskilled worker seeks promotion to a supervisory position, in which position he will have reached his ceiling in formal employment. Secondly, there is the 'entrepreneurial strategy', whereby savings from meagre unskilled or supervisory or even skilled employment are used to open a small business, a move which increases both income and occupational prestige without requiring additional educational inputs. Thirdly, the 'educational strategy' seems to have been used most frequently: starting at the unskilled level, savings are invested in further education including, usually, a teaching qualification. Using one or more of these strategies, it has been possible for a small minority of farmers to move from unskilled, through supervisory, lower professional and self-employment, to higher professional or administrative positions in a relatively short

space of time. Some of these highly successful occupational climbers have endeavoured to ensure their children a head start in the occupational stakes by sending them to private, multiracial boarding schools, a move which has the greatest chance of protecting the children against future downward mobility in the socio-economic sphere.

Having considered the past occupational mobility of the farmers themselves, it is now possible to use the occupational level at which these men retired from wage employment as a base to assess the occupational mobility of their children who, being born prior to 1955, have already entered the labour market. Unfortunately, the data required to assess the past occupational mobility of these 'children' is not available, so this analysis must be static in the intra-generational sense: an attempt will be made to measure only the distance between 'children's' present occupational levels and the levels from which their fathers retired. It is realised that the 'children's' occupations may well alter before they themselves retire from employment, and that this measurement is, therefore, interim and not final. From this interim consideration, however the following points emerge:

1. If the father left wage employment at the unskilled level, his sons are more likely to achieve higher occupational levels than are his daughters. This situation results mainly from differential attention to the education of male and female children by fathers of this occupational level.
2. If the father left wage employment at the supervisory or skilled level, his daughters are more likely to move up through higher occupational levels than are the daughters of men formerly in unskilled employment; and relatively fewer of his sons are employed at the unskilled level.
3. The pattern of occupational distribution among the daughters of farmers who retired from lower professional employment is very similar to that found among daughters of farmers formerly in skilled or supervisory positions. The sons of men formerly in lower professional positions apparently have the greatest chance of attaining

- higher professional status, and are more likely to be found in the lower professional stratum than are the sons of farmers in any other occupational category.
4. Almost without exception, both sons and daughters of farmers who were or are self-employed businessmen have moved down from their fathers' occupational level. The occupational levels of daughters approximate those for daughters of skilled/supervisory or lower professional ex-employees, while the pattern for sons' occupations is similar to that for sons of formerly unskilled workers. Presumably this downward trend among the children of the self-employed is related to the fact that the majority of these entrepreneurs have educational qualifications of a similar order to those of previously unskilled or supervisory workers.
 5. The children of farmers who are or have been employed in higher professional or administrative jobs have also experienced a general decline in occupational status, although the majority have not moved below the level of lower professional employment. Only the daughters of these men seem to stand a reasonable chance of maintaining their fathers' level in the occupational structure, generally as state registered nurses.
 6. Although fewer daughters have moved upwards from their fathers' positions than have sons, they seem to stand a greater chance of achieving higher professional ranking than do their brothers, since over 60 per cent of those 'children' in this category are women. This situation is primarily a result of the inclusion of state registered nurses in this category. The unusual position of African state registered nurses in South Africa has been analysed by Cheater (1974), and their position in Rhodesia appears to be essentially similar as a result of the structural similarity between these two societies.
 7. Very few farmers' daughters are found in supervisory/skilled or self-employment, mainly because of restricted opportunities for women in these fields, and because independent entrepreneurship on the part of women has no well-established precedent in this part of the world, in contrast to the situation in West Africa.
 8. Sixty-six per cent of daughters and sixty-one per cent of sons of Msengezi farmers are employed at occupational levels the same as or adjacent to those from which their fathers retired. Over one-third of these farmers' 'children' are thus two or more steps away from their fathers' final occupational classification, which suggests that the circulation of persons through the different occupational levels is perhaps more rapid than might be expected, and that the people under consideration are employed in an open and mobile society in which ascription of socio-occupational status does not operate, although racial status, ascribed by the national structure of Rhodesia, obviously affects occupational achievement in an absolutely vital manner. This rapid occupational movement, both intra- and inter-generational, is also indicative of the lack of a stable class structure (in the Warnerian sense of classes as status categories).
 9. In aggregate terms, there are remarkable differences in the apparent directions of occupational mobility between the sons and daughters of these farmers. As shown in Table IV, sons have achieved occupational rankings higher than the levels from which their fathers retired, four times more frequently than have daughters, despite the point noted above (point 6) that women attain higher professional status more frequently than do men. This distinction between the upward movement of men as a category and women possibly as individuals, probably reflects relatively fixed and conservative male ideas regarding the proper roles of women in society.

Table IV

DIRECTIONS OF OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY,
FROM THE BASE OF FATHERS'
PRE-RETIREMENT LEVEL, OF SONS AND
DAUGHTERS PRESENTLY IN EMPLOYMENT

<i>Direction of Occupational Mobility</i>	<i>Sons: %</i>	<i>Daughters: %</i>
Vertical: Upward	31.3	8.0
Horizontal: Nil	42.7	56.8
Vertical: Downward	26.0	35.2

Occupational mobility, especially in developing states, is heavily dependent on both economic development and education. While kinship and friendship networks may operate as effective recruitment agencies for relatively undemanding jobs, skilled and professional positions generally require minimum qualifications and open, competitive recruitment procedures. In the past, it was relatively easy to manipulate this system indirectly, by utilising personal ties to get one's children into secondary school. With the increasing bureaucratisation of the educational system, particularly as it affects Africans in Rhodesia, it has become virtually impossible to manipulate the system to the advantage of one's children. Only by taking his children out of the government system and sending them to private, multi-racial schools, can a man hope to ensure his children against dropping out of the system before completing secondary education: such tactics are open to few. Once the children have completed secondary schooling, further training is possible and it is this training on which upward occupational mobility is increasingly dependent.

Since education is a partial key to occupational mobility, educational differences between farmers and their children should, logically, have been discussed prior to intergenerational occupational movement. However, the relationship between educational level and occupation has weakened considerably in the time span separating these generations, for the expansion of primary education facilities to serve a much wider population has resulted in a general rise in educational levels, such that a primary education is no longer a guarantee of unskilled employment, much less a white-collar job. Thus a farmer with a primary education may have been a teacher

of lower professional status, whereas his son, also with a primary education, may be a machine operator, petrol pump attendant or general labourer. Given this need for increased educational attainments in order to stand still in the occupational structure, it is hardly surprising that the vast majority of farmers' children are better educated than were their fathers. Decreased educational attainment among the second generation of Msengezi's population is virtually negligible, although it is somewhat more likely to involve girls than boys.

Children of both sexes have increased chances of reaching the upper levels of secondary school, and even university, when their fathers have had at least a standard one education (three years of formal schooling) themselves. In respect of less educated fathers, however, the situation is different as a result of conservatism, lack of knowledge of how to avail one's children of the available opportunities, low levels of ambition for one's children, and financial factors. Children of educated parents from advantaged home backgrounds, who have access to books, television and parental assistance, have a marked advantage over those who have to finish farm tasks before tackling homework by inadequate light and whose parents cannot provide educational guidance. This advantage is, however, indirect and mediated by the child's own level of ability and ambition, and there are thus among children no significant differences in educational attainments which are directly dependent on the levels of their fathers' schooling.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the widespread opportunities for primary education (there are seven primary schools to serve a population of some 5 500 in Msengezi), of the competitive scramble for secondary school places beyond the grade 7 bottleneck (at present only 37.5 per cent of grade 7 school-leavers proceed to secondary school), and of the fact that the bureaucratic selection system is not open to private manipulation, it seems likely that the formation of a stable class structure will be delayed among black Rhodesians. The education system will continue to produce a small elite drawn from widely differing backgrounds, because this system militates against the development of class 'fixation techniques' on any

significant scale. It therefore seems unlikely that the proto-classes identified earlier in this paper will harden into a rigid structure so long as the present educational system is in operation. It is more probable that the elite (socio-economic category A) will continue to be a relatively exclusive social clique in Msengezi, although the clique personnel will alter, being drawn from different families at different times. The present patterns of extensive occupational differences between adjacent generations may be expected to continue for as long as the educational system retains its present

controlled, exclusive character at the secondary school level and for as long as new occupational opportunities become available to Africans at a fairly rapid rate. Only when the educational system at the secondary and technical levels is open and the complete spectrum of occupational opportunities is available to Africans, does the emergence of a stable class structure appear feasible in Rhodesian society as a whole, in rural as well as urban areas. Opportunities for the investigation of socio-economic mobility under present circumstances should, therefore, be taken while these circumstances prevail.

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